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ABSTRACT

This study compared a measure of theoretical orientation and a measure of style orientation administered to 107 classroom teachers in graduate and undergraduate language arts methods courses, examined their responses to holistic curriculum structures, and examined the types of support that students/teachers needed to modify traditional beliefs. Specifically, the study examined correlations of pre/post instruction scores on the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) with scores on the Gregorc Style Delineator. The TORP measures a teacher's beliefs about reading practices along a continuum from a highly structured phonic orientation to a more open-ended holistic orientation. The Gregorc Style Delineator measures the amount of structure and sense of concreteness (from concrete sequential to abstract random) inherent within individuals. Characteristics of teachers in each quadrant of the Gregorc Style Delineator (concrete sequential, abstract sequential, concrete random, and abstract random) are presented in terms of TORP results. Implications of results include: faculty need to offer discussions of personal orientation and style more frequently to support and confirm obvious differences in performance and need to offer more individualized assistance to students as they prepare course assignments. An appendix lists and describes strategies used with preservice and inservice teachers, including curriculum mapping, ideal teacher/ideal learner, style pre-assessment, and in-process journals. (JDD)

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PERSONALIZING INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION: DIFFERENTIATING SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR TEACHERS

by

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PERSONALIZING INSTRUCTIONAL SUPERVISION: DIFFERENTIATING SUPPORT STRUCTURES FOR TEACHERS

The call for reflective classroom teaching indicates that if we do not practice what we preach at the college level, the gap between theory and practice will continue to widen. Professors must respond to the diverse student population with acceptance and action by offering academic content through a balanced methodology. This study compared a measure of theoretical orientation and a measure of style orientation and examined responses of language arts methods students to wholistic, curriculum structures. It also examined the types of support students/teachers needed to modify traditional beliefs.

We found that we needed to discuss personal style frequently to confirm obvious differences among student performance and model wholistic teaching structures that valued those differences. Then it became easier for teacher education students to transfer this way of thinking to the performance of their own students.

Introduction and Theoretical Perspective:

The call for reflective classroom teaching has been heard at all levels (Lanier & Little, 1986; Holmes Group, 1985; Schon, 1983; VanManen, 1977). Indeed, there are indications that if we do not practice what we preach at the level of college method instruction, the gap between theory and practice will continue to widen. Lampert (1990), Short & Burke (1989), and others have suggested that the learning theories upon which we base our college level instruction need examination in light of the practices we are advocating. As we begin to make learning theories and curriculum structures in the college classroom match advocated practice, the preservice and inservice teachers in methods courses will cease to view education courses as ivory-tower theory and the effects of teacher education programs will less likely be washed out by school experience (Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981). In reflective classroom practice (Schon, 1987) the curriculum structure forms the base for the research and teaching becomes inquiry (Andrews, 1989).

With a variety of students in college classrooms who exhibit a range of structuring behaviors, professors must respond with acceptance and action by offering academic content through a balanced methodology. The same acceptance of different behaviors must also be practiced by the

classroom teacher in field experiences where our teacher education students find themselves placed. To date there has been little attention paid to the support needed by teachers need in order to work effectively with the variety of student styles.

Goals:

Goals of this study included: (a) examining correlations of pre- and post-instruction scores on the Theoretical Orientation to Reading Profile (TORP) (Deford, 1985) with scores on the Gregorc Style Delineator (Gregorc, 1985); (b) augmenting these correlations with qualitative data by examining the responses of graduate and undergraduate language arts methods students to curriculum structures; and (c) examining the difference in supervisory support structures needed for concrete sequential organizers to become more wholistic, integrative teachers, as compared to the support needed by abstract random organizers.

We hypothesized that the higher the concrete sequential (CS) score, the lower the pre-course TORP score would be and the greater the difference between pre-course and post-course scores. Since no instrument currently existed to measure general curriculum orientation, we assumed that the TORP might suggest teachers' and students' orientations to curriculum in general.

Methods:

Data were collected from classroom teachers in graduate and undergraduate courses in language arts methods over a three year period (N=107). Quantitative data included pre and post scores from the TORP and a four segment score from the Gregorc Style Delineator. Students responded to the TORP at the beginning of the course and again at the end of the course. The TORP uses a Likert scale response system to determine teacher beliefs about reading practices along a continuum from a highly structured phonic orientation to a more open-ended wholistic orientation. According to DeFord (1985), the higher the score, the more wholistic a teacher's orientation would be toward reading and language arts instruction.

Students also took the Gregorc Style Delineator at the beginning of the course to indicate the degree of abstractness/concreteness and the strength of structure/randomness in their natural operational style. The Delineator suggests that people differ on four quadrants according to the amount of structure and sense of concreteness (from concrete sequential to abstract random) inherent within themselves. This structural element, when examined in the context of a college classroom, provided useful insight into the abstractions of the human mind evident in the visible

behavior of college students.

Qualitative data included personal reflections and journals written throughout the course, student interviews, course evaluations, and instructors' transactional analyses (Andrews, 1990). Students prepared notebooks which detailed a theme cycle process and descriptions of changes in reading and language curriculum implemented during the semester. Occasional topical papers described their thoughts on specific issues as they participated in this personal inquiry curriculum.

Throughout the course we tried different support structures and activities with our students to see how well they helped personalize subsequent instruction and supervision. Several of these activities are given in the appendix.

Results and Discussion:

Results of correlations of pre- and post-course scores on the TORP with scores on the Gregorc showed that strong concrete sequential (CS) teachers initially tended to be proponents of traditional, highly structured curriculum; low TORP pre-course scores predicted this finding. These teachers likewise supported traditional practice from field experience students. However, these same teachers began to think differently about the learning opportunities in this course as a result of peer support,

supervisory feedback, and self-critique inherent in the team structure and support activities. Though still not completely comfortable with non-traditional, less structured formats, by the end of the course they began to realize the implications of learning theory for democratically run classrooms.

Teachers who scored strongly abstract random (AR) preferred the more open-ended curriculum structures from the start; pre-course scores for this group were higher overall than for CS students. They demonstrated early acceptance and flexibility toward the reflective methods experienced throughout the course.

The average gain between pre- and post-course TORP scores for CS's was greater than the gain for AR's. Our interpretation of this finding was that the intervention (the course) was a powerful learning environment for CS's because it was both intensely and personally meaningful and radically different from their characteristic choice of highly structured learning contexts. We modeled non-threatening ways to open their minds to powerful thinking about curriculum and allowed them time to experience and experiment with ways to adapt their own comfort level to new curriculum strategies.

After four years of personal classroom interaction, the researchers

have noted that structuring strategies fall along a continuum based on the four-axis model proposed by Gregorc (1982).

Briefly outlined, our data revealed that students and teachers who scored high on the concrete sequential axis tended to be excellent in the traditional mode, preferring deadlines and pre-selected assignments. They performed best on recall examinations or when parroting the professor and textbook and structured academic content in highly linear and concrete outline formats.

People who scored high on the abstract sequential axis tended to use words well and had little difficulty with library and research assignments, easily digging into the insights of great minds and manipulating ideas. They preferred to work alone and could be highly focused on one topic for long periods of time. They organized material to be learned in large chunks based on their perception of the total picture.

Students/teachers with high scores on the abstract random axis tolerated changes of schedule and assignment especially well and enjoyed professors/principals who were less than specific in requirements and who honored creativity in completion of assignments. These folk preferred to work in groups to master content or work on assignments.

Those who scored high on the concrete random axis preferred a

course in which they could choose methods, products and timing necessary to complete requirements. They preferred to learn/teach within this flexible framework which allowed them freedom to examine a topic from several viewpoints before deciding which to research in depth.

Qualitative data included journals filled with descriptions of modifications in language arts curriculum implemented during the semester and student/teacher changing attitudes toward these modifications. Children were given choices which they had not been given before and teachers discovered that students hold high expectations for their own and each others' learning. Teacher and child talk also verified the difficulties associated with curriculum change.

These results informed us in several ways. First, we noticed that we needed to offer discussions of personal orientation and style morefrequently to support and confirm obvious differences among our teachers/students' performance. As we discussed these issues, it became easier for teachers to transfer the new way of thinking to their own students' performance (both public school age and university field students) and to curricular issues, in general.

We also offered more individualized assistance to students as they prepared course assignments. We began to value more highly the

individually created curriculum notebooks as the final product. The most consistent requirement which we offered was the outline for theme cycling because topics, grade levels and teacher/student requirements for their own classrooms were so varied. As teachers learned about theme cycling, they chose different aspects of it to emphasize with their students. Some teachers spent a great deal of time activating prior knowledge through webbing and inquiry. Others emphasized the creativity of the project phase. Still others focused on student self-evaluation and personal assessment methods.

Questions for Teacher Education:

The results of this lengthy study have raised questions for us about the ways teachers operate in classrooms and, consequently, about how this might affect supervision practices for inservice and preservice teachers. How easily could random thinkers be influenced by the thought of using practices which appeared to be open-ended and wholistic, choice-rich strategies oriented toward the individual? In other words, would teachers who scored high on the AR axis be more inclined to appreciate less traditional teaching structures and strategies because they validate their own style. Would these more random thinkers be easily influenced by a professor or a principal advocating and demonstrating such practices

because they fit their own preferred mode and are thus easily understood and practiced? Were these same teachers drawn away from tightly structured practice because of negative experience in their own education or dissatisfaction with its effect on their own students who operated in a manner similar to their own? Had they begun to realize that there was a way to approach the teaching of language arts, whether or not they completely understood it, which was different from the way most frequently advocated in textbooks?

Not to ignore those teachers who scored high on sequential axes, we wondered how much of a role their conservative nature played in their consideration of curriculum change. Or did they exhibit less gain from pre- to post-scores because their style type valued the open-ended, wholistic approach less than they valued a structured, traditional mode? Or was it just a "wait and see" attitude?

Style indicators and instruments cannot begin to answer all these questions because within any style there is great variability. But people in positions of supervision must begin to realize how this variability affects teachers' classroom behaviors and decisions. They must know something about their own institutional behaviors and the consequences of requirements for behaviors in others that mirror their own values. A

world devoid of differences and the appreciation of the richness characterized by those differences provides limited growth opportunities.

Providing support structures such as those outlined above helps to personalize and individualize instruction for both pre-service and inservice teachers. By making connections for teachers between their styles and expectations of professors, we help them to analyze and modify their own teaching performance with their own students. As we supervise their work with children we see evidence of these modifications.

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APPENDICES

In this section we have listed and described a few of the strategies and structures which we have used with preservice and inservice teachers. They can be used in different ways to facilitate discussion about, acceptance of and action toward different learning and supervisory styles.

Curriculum Mapping:

A curriculum mapping activity helped teachers and teacher education students compare their ideal curriculum structure and the structure they actually use. During this activity, teachers manipulated a variety of colored shapes representing curriculum components such as basal text, quizzes, lecture, group discussion, tests or hands-on activities. Their goal was to arrange the components in order to provide a graphic look at the way they view the curriculum in their classroom. Teacher education students also manipulated the shapes to represent their own perception of that teacher's curriculum. The two, sometimes disparate viewpoints, provided a vehicle for discussion about curriculum and teaching strategies and allowed different viewpoints to be heard and valued.

Ideal Teacher, Ideal Learner:

Another structure which provoked discussion about teaching and learning style in another way was the one which asked teachers to list characteristics of ideal students and then reverse the list to characteristics of poor students. Students participated in this discussion then provoked a similar discussion with lists of characteristics of ideal teacher and poor teacher. The goal is to reach the understanding that while there is universal agreement about some characteristics of a good learner and a good teacher, there is also a need to acknowledge that differences will still exist.

Style Pre-Assessment:

A third structure which a teacher or professor can use with students is a style pre-assessment instrument. Teachers can use them to help students think about their own style orientation and prepare them to operate within the teacher's expectations. Teachers can also consider or reconsider their own requirements in light of student responses. One version follows:

STYLE PRE-ASSESSMENT
FALL 1993

___ I believe I have valuable knowledge to share.

___ I want clear guidelines and objectives for the college class.

___ I have some ideas about what I need to learn from this class.

___ I believe the professor has the most important content to deliver.

___ I would like to discover some of the content information myself.

___ The professor is the expert that I should not question.

___ I especially like reading the textbook and taking tests.

___ I like to be actively engaged in the learning.

___ I prefer listening and taking notes.

___ I like having a draft of a paper critiqued by the professor and then finishing the final copy.

___ I prefer handing in the final paper for grading.

___ I like to be told what to do, when it is due and exactly what the limitations are.

___ I don't mind schedule changes.

___ I prefer to know exactly when everything is due and every activity will occur.

___ I like deadlines.

___ I like everything I hand in to be graded.

___ I like using the textbook for a resource along with lots of other sources.

___ I am comfortable being asked to create my own products.

___ I work very well amid flexible structure.

___ I like to participate in class.

___ I prefer small classes with student who learn together.

___ I am comfortable in large classes where I am solely responsible for the coursework.

In-Process Journals:

A fourth strategy called in-process journaling allowed professors to facilitate team work and connect teaching practice with theory immediately. It also enabled us to note differences in learning style and orientation to the work in a way that helped our students think about their own students similarly. It can also be used by classroom teachers to provide critical feedback as they supervise field experience students. The format may follow these steps:

In-Process Journals

1. Students work in teams.
2 Assignments (structured or unstructured, instructor or student initiated) are worked on in teams.
3. Instructors circulate with "replay journal" in hand.
4. Instructors receive and record audience talk: student dialogue, student strategies,students' theoretical demonstrations.
5. Instructors give feedback, illustrating students' interactions as they apply to strategies, social learning theoretical concerns from their notes (replay journal).
6. Instructors use replay journals to plan next steps, answer questions, negotiate curriculum with students.